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ABSTRACT

The school leader's behaviors are inspired by theories, and theories are intrinsic to practice. This paper provides an overview of an emerging perspective in educational administration, critical theory. The paper first highlights the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx, and the Frankfurt School. It then discusses critical theory methodology; the use of critical theory for the individual, the group, and society; the reification of organizations; critical theory and educational administration; schools and societal ideology; ideology within schools; and critical theory in educational leadership. Leadership, from the critical perspective, moves beyond the management of things and people to a focus on vision and ideas with the ultimate goal of emancipation. Self-reflection leads to self-knowledge. The school organization is nonhierarchical and based on shared power. To truly reform schools, the ideologically based issues in society and within schools must be exposed. (Contains 48 references.) (LMI)

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CRITICAL THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP THEORY AND PRACTICE

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CRITICAL THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP THEORY AND PRACTICE

Theory and Practice

At first glance, school administrators appear to focus on action with little, if any, attention paid to theory. The school administrator seeks to complete the ever-increasingly varied and numerous tasks and to fulfill the multiplicity of roles demanded by internal and external constituencies. The word "theory" often conjures up a world of vague ideas debated by scholars in meaningless textbooks that do not assist the practitioner. If anything, theories seem to confuse the field of educational administration by attempting to impose so-called "ivory tower" concepts in the day-to-day activities of school leaders.

This assumed dichotomy between theory and practice has its foundation in the positivist paradigm's promise of ultimately attaining generalizable theories that would direct best practices through lists of what to do in specific situations based on scientific research. However, this promise of linking educational theory and educational practice through positivism has not been fulfilled (Dalmage, 1990). Thus, theory has come to be considered as impractical with little or no meaning for the world of the practitioner.

Upon closer scrutiny, theory is the basis for all human action -- it is the why of behavior, even if the why is not termed "theory" by the practitioner. Carr and Kemmis (1986) explained:

> ...since educational practitioners must already have some understanding of what they are doing and an elaborate, if not explicit, set of beliefs about why their practices make sense, they must already possess some "theory" that serves to explain and direct their conduct. (p. 111)

Sergiovanni (1992) termed these underlying beliefs of practice as "mindscapes" and elaborated that when mindscapes fit the world of practice, then better practice will result.

A practice, then, is not a form of thoughtless behavior which is separate from theory and to which theory is applied. All practices have theory, acknowledged or not, embedded in them because all practice is the consequence of beliefs which are conscious or unconscious (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Therefore, the school leader's behaviors are inspired by theories, and theories are intrinsic to practice. However, theories are not mere opinion based upon vague feelings of how to act. Theories provide substantive grounds for practice, otherwise, the actions of school leaders "would be seen as ad hoc, based on narrowly subjective opinion, or both" (Maddock, 1990, p. 290).

Theory and Practice in School Leadership

In 1990, The National Commission for the Principalship posited a change in perspective on educational administration practice and theory. The Commission viewed the old scientific paradigms as antiquated and of limited value to the improvement of educational leadership and called for a realignment of theory with practice by analyzing research directly in the life of the schools. This national request for a renewed view of the relationship between theory and practice is significant, because practitioners must realize that theory is embedded in practice and provides the why of behavior. To understand practice is to understand the underlying beliefs upon which that practice is based. School

leaders must understand the whys of their leadership behavior in order to know themselves and adjust their beliefs and resulting behaviors when necessary.

The contributors to the field of leadership theory also are highly contentious about the relation between theory and practice. Sergiovanni (1992) proposed that:

> For the most part, the study of leadership has dwelt on issues of style and levels of decision making, assessing the consequences of their variations for followers satisfaction, individual compliance and performance, and organizational effectiveness. . . . Best is defined as what gets subordinates to do what the leader wants and be happy about it. (p. 2)

Hanson (1996) viewed the various theories of leadership as offering advice about the roles of leaders. These theories and roles are as diverse as individuals who can choose all or parts of the various theories to justify their actions. Leadership theories include those based upon traits, behavior, power, styles, contingencies, situations, transformational/transactional activities or culture.

But, leadership is not personal behavior which can be justified by some theory. Leadership is behavior based upon theory. As Sergiovanni (1992) clarified: "The heart of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to -- the person's personal vision, to use a popular term" (p. 7). Thus, theory is not a set of concepts imposed upon behavior after behavior has occurred, but a person's beliefs which are the underlying causes of behavior.

Critical Theory

The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) commissioned seven study teams to identify traditional and emerging perspectives in educational

administration. In 1994, Hoy reported the results of this study and indicated that "the field seems to be moving away from the study of particular administrative and teaching skills, behaviors, and competencies toward an examination of the role of educational administration and teaching in a democratic society" (p. 196). The UCEA report concluded that the emerging perspective in educational administration was critical theory.

Definition of Critical Theory

While maintaining strong political overtones, the theorists who adhere to critical theory have sought to neutralize specific political overtones by placing emphasis on its universal application in a philosophical manner. As such, Horkheimer (cited in Held, 1980) defined critical theory in a broad theoretical manner:

> Critical theory aims to assess the breach between ideas and reality. The method or procedure is immanent criticism. Immanent criticism confronts the existent, in its historical contexts, with the claim of its conceptual principles, order to criticize the relation between the two and transcend them. (p. 183)

While reality is criticized and contrasted with ideation about reality, the political aspects of reality become just one of the factors affecting reality.

Historical Development of Critical Concepts

The culmination of critical theory concepts is found is the ideas of the Frankfurt School whose members (Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Habermas) sought to develop a theoretical position that would lead to more than knowledge. Their goal was to change society. The members of the Frankfurt School were dispersed in the late 1930s due to World War II. As their writings were translated, a renewed interest in the relation of critical theory to educational practice developed in the 1960s in the United States. This

interest was noted by the May 1985 Conference on the Study of Human Research at the University of Alberta during which a week of seminars was devoted to the application of critical theory to education, as well as by the recent UCEA study (Hoy, 1994) which indicated that critical theory was the most prominent emerging perspective in educational administration.

The historical and philosophical assumptions of critical theory can be traced back to concepts of Immanuel Kant. Kant's basic concept was that through the mind's interaction with objective world, meaning and order are imposed upon reality. As a follower of Kant, Fichte (1762-1814) was the first theoretician to coherently express the assumptions of critical theory. Fichte viewed the individual consciousness as a "continuously creative entity generating a perpetual stream of ideas, concepts and perspectives through which a world external to the mind is created" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 279). This process of creation was dynamic in that the external world became a means for people to understand themselves better through their conscious creations. Such creation and externalization and the interplay between the two became the basis for the concept of alienation which, as defined by Berger and Pullberg (1967), is a basic assumption of critical theory:

> By alienation we mean the process by which the unity of the producing and the product is broken. The product now appears to be producer as an alien facticity and power standing in itself and over against him, no longer recognizable as a product. In other words, alienation is the process by which man forgets that the world he lives in has been produced by himself. (p. 61)

Thus, peoples' creations are to be viewed as a means to understand reality and not as realities in themselves.

Fichte's concepts of the interaction and resulting alienation between human consciousness and its created external reality were further developed in the works of Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel proposed that absolute knowledge was the goal of human inquiry. This absolute existed beyond man and would be achieved when men understood created external reality as part of their consciousness. Hegel viewed consciousness and external reality as two sides of the same reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Only by understanding a concept (thesis) and its opposite (antithesis) could true knowledge or synthesis occur (Kaufman, 1984). Synthesis resulted in a higher form of knowledge than previously held by human consciousness. This process was called the dialectic.

Unlike Fichte, who viewed the problem of alienation as a pathology of human existence, Hegel saw alienation as the motivating factor for people to engage in the dialectical process and thus achieve a higher level of knowledge. This knowledge would continue to rise to a higher level until absolute knowledge was attained and alienation no longer existed. For Hegel, human behavior was a dynamic social process and the dialectical process eventually would result in the perfect society.

This Hegelian concept of the consistent forward movement of man and the Fichtean concept of alienation were combined and expanded by Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx viewed society as being engaged in an evolutionary process, but this process was not based on the Hegelian search for absolute knowledge but upon the search for an egalitarian society. The dialectical process occurs because power is distributed unequally among men and only in a classless society will evolutionary change reach its fulfillment (Applebaum,

1970). Marx concurred with Fichte's view that alienation was problematical for human development, but tied the causation of alienation to the economic and political status of his times--capitalism.

For Marx, knowledge should result in action. Knowledge should cause men to change. To know for the sake of knowing could not influence the evolutionary process of humanity because action is the means whereby evolution is furthered since action brings about change. Kaufman (1984) summarized Marx's concepts on the relation between action and knowledge:

> Marx's doctrine maintains that the knowing of reality was also the changing of it. Knowing for Marx was not an end in itself; we know in order to act. Knowledge cannot be understood independently of its relation to action. Action, within a Marxian perspective, changes the objects in the environment acted upon and it also changes the subject. (p. 81)

Marx viewed the interrelationship between knowledge and action as intrinsic to peoples' natures. Knowledge produced change in people and change impelled action.

For Marx, the concepts of Fichte and Hegel became wedded in such a manner as to form the basis for ideas developed by the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. Held (1980) summarized the melding of these concepts by the Frankfurt School:

> The extension and development of the notion of critique, from a concern with the conditions and limits of reason and knowledge (Kant), to a reflection on the emergence of spirit (Hegel), and then to a focus on specific historical forms--capitalism, the exchange process (Marx)--was furthered in the work of the Frankfurt theorists. They sought to develop a critical perspective in the discussion of all social practices. (p. 16)

This coalescence of the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Marx by members of the Frankfurt School resulted in the theoretical position of critical theory.

Critical Theory Methodology

The goal of critical theory, according to Popkewitz (1984), is to "change the world not describe it" (p , 45). To engage in the dialectical process causes an increased awareness of reality, and change occurs. Such change is not seen as serendipitous but as leading to the emancipation of mankind because the dialectical process enables man to distinguish between the real and ideal and move toward the ideal. Evolutionary movement for critical theorists is not the imperative evolution of the Marxian position, but is, according to Horkheimer (Agger, 1983), a movement consisting of "contingent advances and retreats in the struggle for human liberation" (p. 350).

The essence of critical theory lies in the person's exposure of the dichotomy between the real and ideal. The real is subjected to a critical examination in order to expose its contradictory nature. This exposure of the dichotomy of reality is termed criticism and thus was defined by Horkheimer (as cited in Bernstein, 1976):

> By criticism, we mean that intellectual and eventually practical effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit; effort which aims to coordinate the individual sides of social life with each other and the general ideas and aims of the epoch, to deduce them genetically, to distinguish the appearance from the essence, to examine foundations of things, in short, to really know them. (p. 180)

Such intensity of investigation on the part of an individual is not for the purpose of mere exposure, but to determine what needs to be changed in society. As part of the evolutionary progress of society, this exposure of the contrast between the real and ideal,

according to Popkewitz (1984), brings to the individual the knowledge needed to determine what premises and assumptions of social life are subject to transformation and those propositions which are not.

Critical theorists go beyond mere muckraking to action. The exposure of the dichotomy of reality contains within its nature an imperative to bring real closure to the ideal because its goal is the emancipation of human capacities. Criticism seeks to show the potential for society's rational development because, according to Marcuse (as cited in Held, 1980), the exposure of dichotomy also displays the potential as an inherent element of reality: "It shows that this structure contains realized potentialities--potentialities created by a gulf between human existence and human essence, the unfulfilled, historically constituted abilities and capacities of human beings" (pp. 224-225). The imperative for change is essential in critical theory because what are exposed is not only the problems of society but also the ideal resolutions of these problems and, by nature, man evolves toward the ideal.

For a critical theorist, each person is capable of engaging in criticism. The individual seeks to discover the difference between reality and appearance in all areas of life: in relation to other individuals and groups, in an individual's conflict with classes of people, with the social totality, and with nature (Horkheimer, 1972). The means the individual uses to engage in such an investigation are both quantitative and qualitative because both objective and subjective reality is under investigation (Held, 1980).

Theory Derived From Criticism

The result of critical investigation of reality is the generation of theory. For a critical theorist, theory reverts back to the early Greek definition of "theoria" as a means of differentiating between appearance and reality. This definition is consistent with Held's (1980) statement on the meaning of theory to a critical theorist:

> The purpose of theory is to expose and analyze the hiatus between the actual and the possible, between the existing order of contradictions and a potential future state. Theory must be oriented to the development of consciousness and the promotion of active political involvement. (p. 22)

Theories expose the difference between appearance and reality and, as such, function only as motivators for action not as directions for action. This distinction was made by Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980):

> They cannot dictate and justify action. Theory can only be used to create agents capable of full participation in decisions concerning action and it can be used to support arguments in favor of certain courses of action. But it cannot be used, in any automatic or mechanistic way, to generate strategy or to ensure the success of strategic action. (p. 349).

Unlike theories generated under the positivistic perspective, critical theories elucidate the chasms between reality and the ideal which provides reasons and not directions for actions.

Because theory is to motivate the individual person, it must be understandable to that person. Otherwise, as Hekman (1983) stated, "it fails as an explanation" (p. 132). Theory is to be a useful tool for the individual and, as such, the individual person not the scientific community determines the validity of theory. If individuals use a theory as a motivating force for their actions, then that theory is viewed as significant (Wellmer,

1971). This practical aspect of theory is of intrinsic value to the critical theorist, because, otherwise, theory becomes a statement of mere words which have meaning for the objective researcher but not for the person engaged in human behavior.

The theory generated by critical research is not equal to the lawlike regularities discerned by the positivistic theorist. Because theory is generated in a historical, subjective, and objective manner, no laws can be formulated which hold true for all times. Boudon (1983) viewed theories as regularities which can be observed in the past, but not extended into the future because of the changes which occur both historically and subjectively. Horkheimer (as cited in Held, 1980) clarified this evolutionary role of theory:

> The theory which we see as right may one day disappear because the practical and scientific interest which played a role in its conceptual development, and more importantly the things and conditions to which it referred have disappeared but a later correction does not mean that the earlier truth was an earlier untruth. The dialectic freed from the idealist illusion overcomes the contradiction between relativism and dogmatism. (p. 182)

For the critical theorist, to extend current theory into the future is conjecture.

In summary, the general methodology of critical theory is accomplished by maintaining a critical perspective of all aspects of reality and by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation. The result of this criticism is to expose the dichotomy between the real and ideal. Such exposure generates theories which are evolutionary in nature and which become a motivating force of human action. The test of a valid theory, for the critical theorist, is in the resulting human action.

Individual Emancipation

Members of the Frankfurt School developed more specific methodologies for exposing the dichotomy of reality. Critical theory is considered to be influential on three levels of reality: the individual, intersubjective socialization, and society as a totality. The ultimate goal is to change society, but such change cannot occur until criticism progresses from the individual through social groups to society as a whole.

To engage in the dialectical process, an individual must discover what reality is and what it is not. According to Marcuse (as cited in Held, 1980), this process occurs by individual "thought which must reconstruct the process whereby every being or entity becomes its own opposite and then negates this opposition by transforming itself" (p. 231). This thought process is termed self-reflection. To become aware of the contradictory nature of reality, each individual must become an observer of the relationship between his own consciousness and the reality he is attempting to understand

Geuss (1981) defined the activity of the self-reflection process as dissolving self-generated objectivity and objective illusion, making the individual aware of his own genesis or origin, and bringing to consciousness unconscious determinants of action. Self-reflection results in self-knowledge. By furthering understanding of self, one is able to achieve control over forces upon one's conduct that previously dominated the individual. Self-reflection results in power--power over oneself and the lessening of the power of external forces.

By obtaining more control over oneself, a person then is able to become more emancipated, more self-determined, and less outwardly controlled. This freedom allows the individual to act more as he chooses to as opposed to acting as others determine. The goal of self-reflection, as indicated by Denhardt (1981), is liberated human behavior: "To engage in serious and unconstrained self-reflection leads to self-knowledge and guided by self-reflection, we can engage in responsible social action" (p. 113). This relationship between self-reflection and action was clarified by Codd (1984): "Reflection without action is verbalism; action without reflection is activism" (p. 19). People are thus viewed as beings who are able to change personal behavior for the better and this occurs through self-reflection.

To become emancipated and gain power over oneself is the ultimate goal of self-reflection. The results of gaining power over oneself will be demonstrated by one's actions. Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) incorporated these concepts and developed a more precise definition of the actions which would result from self-reflection. He posited language as the resultant action which would demonstrate one's self-control.

Group Emancipation

Habermas viewed language as the means by which man holds power over other men. Whereas self-reflection provides man with power over himself, language provides the individual with power over others. The resulting action from self-reflection is viewed by Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) as occurring in a social format and language is one

of the "crucial media through which the social life of the human species unfolds" (p. 271). Thus, after self-reflection, the critical process continues in language.

Action and language are intertwined. Giddens (1977) defined language as "the medium of doing things through communication with others" (p. 139). This communication is distorted when decisions are reached which only appear to reflect a consensus of those engaged in the communication. The apparent consensus is not real because of the inequality of power among the participants. The powerful people use communication to enforce their view of reality on the less powerful. A critical theorist needs to uncover this discrepancy between reality and appearance of consensus and expose the underlying power base which controls those in a subordinate position. For a critical theorist who accepts Habermas' concepts, methodology becomes a study of human language.

Consistent with the dialectical assumption, Habermas (as cited in Held, 1980) described the ideal communication process wherein power is equalized and undistorted communication can occur:

> The condition for a grounded consensus is a situation in which there is mutual understanding between participants, equal chances to select and employ speech acts, recognition of the legitimacy of each to participate in the dialogue as autonomous and equal partners and where the resulting consensus is due simply to the force of the better argument. In other words, the conditions of the ideal speech situation must ensure equal opportunity for discussion, from domination whether arising from internal or external constraints. (pp. 343-344)

Before people can expose the underlying ideologies in society, people must expose the underlying power struggles within the group of discussants and, thereby, enable the group members to engage in truly free communication.

Societal Emancipation

Whether through self-reflection or the study of language, critical theory remains a social theory whose goal transcends the betterment of the individual or of a group of people engaged in communication. The ultimate goal of critical theory is the emancipation of society in its totality as becomes apparent in the application of critical theory to social and political issues.

As the individual must emancipate himself from his own self-imposed concepts, so must society. Society's self-imposed concepts which contribute to its alienation are termed ideology, and, according to Geuss (1981), critical theorists hold the criticism of society and the criticism of society's dominant ideology to be inseparable. Because of critical theory's positioning of ideological critique as intrinsic to its emancipatory goal, critical theory often is viewed as a radical political position, because social emancipation is defined as being obtained when society obtains power over itself.

Such emancipation through examination of contemporary social and political issues was determined by Held (1980) to lead to "the development of a non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic politics" (p. 16). As each person moves toward freedom, so does society. Society should strive towards greater human emancipation by the exposure of oppressive societal conditions.

As the dialectic in which the individual engages creates a predisposition for change owing to the propensity of individuals to choose the rational over the irrational, so too does the exposure of the irrationality of contemporary ideology provide the impetus for society to move toward a more rational and emancipating ideology. The Frankfurt theorists sought to maintain this political perspective but also chose to refute Marx's position of placing the source for all social ills upon one form of ideology. Critical theory under the Frankfurt theorists does not lead directly to one form of ideology because critical theory, according Habermas (as cited in Bernstein, 1976), is a catalyst for action and not a justification for action:

> Theory can never be used directly to justify political action. When this demand is placed upon theory--when it is assumed that theoretical statements can provide an absolute authority in deciding what is to be done--both theory and practice are mutilated. (p. 216)

Critical theory assists the development of society by providing society with a more rational view of the status quo and, then, positing society's freedom to choose among alternatives.

Reification of Organizations

Social structures such as organizations are one of the elements which critical theorists posit as a cause for human alienation. Organizations are viewed as man-made creations and social entities which exist of themselves. Geuss (1981) clarified this social phenomenon and its relationship to its creators:

> Social institutions are not phenomena; they don't just exist of and by themselves. The agents in a society impose coercive institutions on themselves by participating in them and accepting them without protest. (p. 67)

The reason for the imposition of such social structures is to provide the individual with a mediator between himself and the society as a whole.

Human beings tend to objectify their subjective creations and view them as entities with independent existence. Objectification causes the organization to be perceived as other than self-created and produces a conceptual wedge between the creator and the created object. This process is termed reification and the relationship between alienation and objectification in regard to organizations was described by Berger and Pullberg (1967):

> By reification we mean the moment in the process of alienation in which the characteristic of thing-hood becomes the standard of objective reality. That is, nothing can be conceived of as real that does not have the character of a thing--reification is objectification in an alienated mode. (p. 61)

Under the critical perspective, organizations are defined as "middle-ranged reified social constructs which intervene between the consciousness of individual human beings and their appreciation of the nature of the totality in which they live" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 311).

The reification of organizations which causes the critical theorist to view organizations as further sources of alienation from truth prompted Burrell and Morgan (1979) to term this critical perspective as "anti-organization" theory because organizations are seen "to mystify human beings in their attempt to comprehend and appreciate the nature of the totality in which they live" (p. 311). As such, organizations are a prime source of criticism for critical theorists through which the alienation reflected in the

organizational mode of life is unmasked. As a reflection of the total society, organizations are critiqued for the same pathologies which exist in society as a whole: rationality, communication, and ideology.

Critical theorists perceive that "under the sign of Taylorism and scientific management, instrumental rationality extended its influence from the domination of nature to the domination of human beings" (Giroux, 1983, p. 20). This influence occurred because the goal of instrumental rationality is prediction and control, while the goal of human rationality is emancipation and these goals are in apparent conflict. Institutional dominance contradicts human emancipation under the auspices of logic or, as Foster (1982) indicated: "It perverts rationality in the name of rationality" (p. 10).

Within organizations, communication is critiqued as being an impediment to the understanding of the totality. By using language which continues to reify organizations, communication maintains the status quo and produces further alienation from truth. Habermas (as cited in Bates, 1983) viewed this distortion of communication in organizations as "the major disabling mechanism that frustrates the celebration of community" (pp. 35-36). By reaffirming the segmentation of society, language prevents people from liberating themselves from reified dominance. Only by critiquing language can the dominance be exposed because "systematically distorted communication prevails among people. Such communication becomes normal, otherwise the repressive character of social relations would become evident (Ramos, 1981, p. 15). The role of the critical theorist is to expose such repression.

As a means of societal dominance, organizations have power over other societal structures and over members of the organization itself. To discover the basis of this power, the critical theorist seeks to expose not the apparent and superficial stated goals of the organization but the underlying ideology which is the source of the organizational control because, as T. Barr Greenfield (1974) clarified:

> Without understanding the ideological issues in an organization and in particular without knowing what ideology is in control, the general principles of organization mean relatively little in terms of what people experience in an organization. (p. 11)

Ideology is the underlying belief system upon which actions are based and it is also the source of power in that ideology binds people in a sense of community which may not be understood by all members of the organization. The exposure and critique of ideology allows the members to decide if they want to continue participation in such a belief system or to change it.

Critique of Critical Theory

As one pursues the philosophical obscurities of critical theory writings, one is able to discover four clear conceptual and methodological bases for critical theory: self-knowledge through self-reflection, critique of language by individuals and groups, critique of reified organizations, and critique of societal ideology. The ultimate goal is to emancipate the individual, groups, and society from externally imposed power through ideology. However, critics of critical theory argue that its proponents often obfuscate these concepts.

Robinson (1994) questioned why critical approaches to educational administration rarely move beyond critique to the transformational process. While the goal of critical theory is to change the individual and, ultimately, society, critical theory appears to be mired in words not actions. Robinson's review of critical research projects in education determined that these projects often stop short of the social action which is supposed to the hallmark of this approach.

Apple (1996), a major writer in the field of critical theory, also criticized this focus on words and not on action: "all too many 'critical educational theorists' coin trendy neologisms but remain all too disconnected from the lives and struggles of real people in real institutions" (p. 44). The focus of critical theory is to critique the current situation through words in order to change the situation for the better. If the words are obscure and the method stagnates at the level of critique, then critical theory becomes an elitist approach of pure rhetoric with no practical application for educators.

The method of critique itself has been impugned as both distorting reality and as causing divisiveness. Maddock (1990) proposed that the critical perspective on education "... is limited and tends to distort and disguise the actual conditions that hold among knowledge, expertise, and social power" (p. 289). By assuming that power, control, and subordination are under only the ideological perspective, critical theory is viewed as being closed in its vision of reality and how to change reality. Robinson (1994) continued this critique of critical theory by arguing that the critical approach presumes conflict is

unhelpful and mistakenly interprets responsibility as external to the individual or groups engaging in critique.

If critical theory is based on the assumption of immanent criticism of all aspects of reality, then critical theory itself must be open to criticism. However, dissension among theorists should not preclude an investigation of the practical applications of critical theory to the field of education.

Critical Theory and Practice in School Leadership

Critical Educational Administration Theory

The role of educational administration from the critical perspective is to enable individuals within schools to become aware of the societal ideological restraints placed upon them and, through reflection by individuals or groups, become less controlled by restraints. Thus, theory is not "a mere vehicle that becomes superfluous as soon as data are at hand" (Giroux, 1983, p. 17), but a vital, dynamic, and evolutionary motivator for action. Schools are considered as objective entities engaged in ideological maintenance, but there exists no formal body of theory about schools because schools are composed of individual people and the tension between these individuals and the school is what provides the impetus for these individuals to engage in critique of oppression and thus become free from restraints.

For educational leaders, critical theory does not provide statements of how they should act. Instead, critical theory generates statements of specific instances of reality in schooling on which administrators then reflect. These statements of reality are evaluated and then incorporated into administrators' actions, if the statements are reflectively acceptable. Theory is generated by individuals engaged in the critique of reality and the resultant exposure of the inconsistencies between the real and the ideal. Under this perspective, each person is a theorist and the theory generated is personal and may or may not be accepted by others. Thus, there is not a specific body of educational administration theory from the critical perspective.

Critical educational administration theory provides a means whereby school leaders can understand and ultimately disentangle themselves from the external and internal forces which impinge upon educational practice. As Hoy (1994) clarified: "Critical theory attempts to raise peoples' consciousness about their living and working conditions through logic and debate, but in the process it relies on the generation and analysis of ideologies" (pp. 183-184). The mere understanding of these forces or ideologies is insufficient from the critical perspective. Understanding must lead to action.

Schools and Societal Ideology

Critical theorists posit schools as inherently influenced by societal values which directly impact the day-to-day actions of students, teachers, and administrators. Apple (1982) viewed the school "as a site where the state, economy, and culture are

interrelated . . . ." (p. 30). These external forces defined public education in the past and present and seek to transform education in the future based on specific political values and social goals. Critical theorists expose these underlying values and goals so that educators can view current practices and proposed reforms in a broader societal perspective.

In 1982, Apple alerted educators to the increasing influence of big business on public education. His focus was on proposals for voucher plans and tax credits which would allow for school choice. Apple clarified that private gain under the rhetoric of democracy and personal choice was being substituted for the public good.

In 1996, Apple explicated the current attempt to tie a good education to the American economy. He further explored the Rightist influence on education through national examinations, standards, and curriculum. By standardization of public education, the actions within a school are controlled at the national level in order to inculcate specific values and preclude other values from influencing education.

Apple's (1996) major premise was that schools are being used as scapegoats for societal problems. Giroux (1992) previously expanded on this premise in his critique of Goals 2000 and educational testing. Apple concluded that this intertwining of economic and educational issues is based on political gain:

> What are the reasons that educational restructuring is given so much importance in dealing with unemployment and underemployment? One reason is the government's need for legitimacy. It must be seen to be doing something about these problems. Reforming education is not only widely acceptable and relatively unthreatening, but just as crucially, its success or failure will not be obvious in the short term. (p. 88)

Government posits societal problems as stemming from schools and, therefore, the solutions are to be found in the schools; however, government neglects the origins of societal problems in society itself.

Ozman and Craver (1995) viewed schools as directly linked to the current economic and political ideology. By the public's insistence on control of schools and the school's role in preparing students for work:

> . . . schools produce workers by reproducing the conditions of the workplace. . . . the school has a dual function--it provides skills and knowledge that make workers more economically valuable, and it socializes people to existing economic structures by modeling the school after the workplace with its rules, lines of authority, and hierarchies. . . . the schools promoted conformity to a set of authority relationships existing in the capitalistic economic system. (p. 340)

Schools embody the current economic and political ideology and through schools' ideological mechanisms, promotes and provides for future citizens who will be prepared to continue the current economic and political ideology.

These examples of critical theorists' explications of ideological influences on public education are not for the purpose of pure rhetoric and public interest. School leaders must be proactive and not reactive to these influences. When confronted with the reality of the economic, religious, and political bases for current practices and proposed educational reforms, school leaders must realize the need to become major players in the political arena. Whether through national, state, or local organizations, administrators must speak out publicly and question those who seek to influence education for their own ends because, as Razik and Swanson (1993) clarified: "Critical theorists strive for an

educational system that will influence society rather than permit society to dominate and control educational and other social institutions" (p. 558).

Ideology Within Schools

According to critical theorists, schools are one form of organization constructed by people which further distances individuals from understanding the reality of society as a totality and also contributes to people's alienated condition. Because schools are a product of society, they reflect and embody the values which that society maintains. As such, schools continue to inculcate these values into the young members of society and, thus, serve as ideological maintenance institutions which perpetuate rather than change societal values.

Schools are viewed by critical theorists as created human structures which maintain current societal ideology. As proponents of ideological maintenance, schools participate in establishing "the constraints on truth-speaking practices which prevent the populace and theorists alike from exposing outrageous social conditions" (Fuhrman & Sizek, 1979-80, p. 39). While schools are seen as aligned with the oppressive status quo, Bressler (1963) perceived schools as having the potential to emancipate society:

> Social change can be controlled by the application of disciplined intelligence. . . . the educational process is the only alternative to stagnation or revolutionary violence. It is the duty of education to preside over gradualistic change toward a more perfect expression of the democratic tradition. (p. 8)

Under the critical perspective, schools continue the social and intellectual restraints which cause people to remain oppressed.

The critical theorist asserts that the daily practices of school personnel embodies the prevailing societal ideology. This embodiment of ideology is self-maintaining because, as Mannheim (1968) explained, school personnel pass on this ideology to their students: "The collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society to itself and to others and thereby stabilizes it" (p. 36). In a broader perspective, critique of the schooling process must occur for the exposure of the social and economic roots of the schooling process itself and of the knowledge which is imparted through the schools.

In a more specific perspective, exposure must also occur within the school setting for school personnel to become aware of the prevailing school ideology which is the basis for educational decisions and actions. Bates (1982) argued that the role of actively exposing and analyzing the relationship between societal ideology and schooling is unique to school leadership because:

> Organizations are cultures rather than structures and it is the maintenance and contestation of what is to constitute the culture of organizational life that provides the dynamic of rationality, legitimation and motivation in organizations. This dynamic is the praxis of the administration. (p. 5)

Foster (1982) continued to elucidate this critical function of school administrators:

> A useful theory of educational administration, if such could be found, would serve to integrate research on the relationship between internal school and classroom events and external social structures, with a critical and dialectical appreciation of how one affects the other. (p. 15)

Schools are perceived not as isolated institutions but as functioning components of the society which create and maintain these social constructs in order to perpetuate prevailing

social values. School leaders are the appropriate personnel to disclose the social and economic roots of the knowledge maximized in schooling. This awareness then can be utilized to understand the values and practices which exist within schools.

Two examples of values and practices within schools which maintain the ideological perspective of schools are the choice of curriculum and the labeling of students. In 1979, Apple contended that the school curriculum is inherently political:

> Knowledge that now gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. It is a form of cultural capital that comes from somewhere, that often reflects the perspectives and beliefs of powerful segments of our social collectivity. In its very production and dissemination as a public and economic commodity--as books, films, materials, and so forth--it is repeatedly filtered through ideological and economic commitments. (p. 8)

What is included in curriculum is not value-free but is a purposeful choice based on values which are often indiscernible but promoted as benefiting students.

Apple (1979) also perceived the actions of the educators within schools as maintaining specific ideological perspectives. These actions were deemed as "the hidden curriculum" or "the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply be their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years" (p. 14). Thus, students are exposed not only to academic knowledge which is based on external values of what students should know but also exposed to the routine actions of educators which define social relations and behaviors.

Apple (1996) also criticized schools for labeling students as behavioral, emotional, or educational problems. He argued that ". . . the difficulties students and teachers face are perceived by and described as existing within and caused primarily by 'deficits' or 'diseases' in the students themselves" (p. 69). Apple viewed the causation of student problems not as school issues but as societal issues. If student problems are viewed as school issues, then society can place the blame for and resolution of these problems within the school. Society then can be seen as responsive to but not responsible for school problems.

Thus, to the critical theorist, schools perpetuate and inculcate predominant societal ideologies and values:

> As children learn to accept as natural the social distinctions schools both reinforce and teach between important and unimportant knowledge, between normality and deviance, between work and play, and the subtle ideological rules and norms that inhere in these distinctions, they also internalize visions of both the way institutions should be organized and their appropriate place in these institutions. (Apple, 1979, p. 142)

The mere exposure of the underlying ideologies of school practices and values is not able to break the grip of the ideology on schooling but will assist school personnel to change their awareness of the power bases in schools through the process of reflection. Internal change in awareness will lead to external change in action. This is the goal of critical critique--to have people become free from the prevailing ideological pressures and thus be more freely able to make choices and act accordingly.

Giroux (1983) acknowledged that educators have a unique role in critique because they not only can change themselves but also can influence change in students and, thereby, influence change in society: "Educators can begin to identify how ideologies become constituted and they can then identify and reconstruct social practices and processes that break rather than continue existing forms of social and psychological domination" (p,32).

The critique of the schools continues when the school leader moves beyond the superficial actions of those engaged in education to the values, myths, and language which truly present the underlying ideology of schooling and perpetuate the behavior of school people. The role of the administrator is to discover the "why" of a situation.

Obvious overt human action is the laboratory for critique. Factual, descriptive behavior must be viewed in light of its underlying ideology because, as Foster (1980) indicated:

> Facts are embedded in a text of values, and if one looks at administration as the direction of resources to solve problems, then it should be clear that at the most basic level, problems are defined as such only because they conflict with certain values. (p. 498)

These values are perpetuated in schools through myths which guide the organizational life (Bates, 1982), and the understanding of this value system must encompass these myths. The Habermasian emphasis on the study of ordinary language communication further enables the administrator to become aware of the myths and the values which constitute the school's ideology.

Such awareness can only lead school leaders to a change in their practice of administration. As Denhardt (1981) proposed, the emphasis of administration moves from power and control to awareness of differing value systems:

> The critical approach might suggest an alternative style of management, one aimed not merely at control but rather at assisting individuals in discovering and and pursuing their own developmental needs, even recognizing that these may sometimes be at odds with those of the dominant values of the bureaucracy. (p. 633)

By engaging in a critique of schools and of the underlying ideology of society perpetuated by the schools, administrators not only free themselves from the bonds of this ideology; but, resultingly, also seek to assist those subordinate to them to become likewise aware of and free themselves from these bonds. Thus, according to Carr (1980), the school leader moves toward the ultimate goal of critical theory which is emancipation:

> A basic feature of critical educational theory is that it seeks to emancipate practitioners from their dependence on practices that are the product of precedent, habit and tradition by developing modes of analysis and inquiry that are aimed at exposing and examining the beliefs, values and assumptions implicit in the theoretical framework through which practitioners organize their experiences. (p. 66)

The tasks of the school leader are to expose the influence of societal ideology on the school's ideology, to assist members of the school community to become aware of their own ideological influences, and to engage in personal dialectic to understand the ideological influences on personal administrative behavior.

Critical School Leadership

Leadership moves beyond management of things and people to a focus on vision and ideas with the ultimate goal of emancipation. By freeing themselves and members of the school community from repressive ideologies, school leaders develop a personal vision as well as lead others to develop a vision of education which will lead to action and, ultimately, change. As Hoy (1994) clarified: "The role of educational leaders is to create effective symbols that transform the existing social order into a truly democratic society" (p. 186).

The source of the school leader's personal vision is self-reflection which leads to self-knowledge. As Osterman (1990) proposed:

> Reflection is concentration and careful consideration, and reflective practice is the mindful consideration of one's actions, specifically, one's professional actions. This reflective practice, however, is far more than leisurely speculation on one's own successes and failures, and far more than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Rather, reflective practice is a challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's own behavior as a means towards developing one's own craftsmanship. While reflection is certainly essential to the process, reflective practice is a dialectic process in which thought is integrally linked with action. (p. 134)

The task of self-reflection is generated by a problem, a discrepancy between what occurred and what was expected or between the real and the ideal. School leaders step back and examine their actions and the reasons for their actions. They use this new perception as a means of developing alternative strategies and, thus, take an active role in shaping their personal professional growth (Osterman, 1990).

Whether through personal journals (Cooper & Heck, 1992) or contemplation, critical school leaders engage in the dialectic process in order to understand the

discrepancies which occur in professional actions. Critical school leaders are skeptical and questioning of personal ideas and actions because they ". . . recognize the partiality of our own views in order to render them more suspect and open ended. . . ." (Giroux, 1992, p. 16).

However, the goal of self-reflection is not just to understand personal actions and ideas; the goal is to change actions and ideas when deemed necessary. "Reflection combined with personal vision and an internal system of values, becomes the basis of leadership strategies and actions" (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 7). Osterman (1990) elaborated on this relationship between self-reflection and action:

> Reflective practice assumes that two elements are necessary if individuals are to bring about change: reflection and agency. Through reflection, professionals develop ideas about how to do things more effectively, and they transform these ideas into action. Whether or not change occurs depends on whether or not people have ideas, and on whether or not they experience a sense of agency or personal causality that enables them to become actively involved in the change process and to introduce new strategies within the classroom, the school, the district, or the community. (p. 145)

Thus, critical school leaders define and change their visions and actions through self-reflection.

However, personal vision and action must be viewed in light of the totality known as a school because the critical perspective provides a view of organizations as groups of people united in common purpose. This common purpose provides a sense of community whereby all involved engage in activities which emancipate individuals as well as the community as a whole. Sergiovanni (1992) described such a school community:

> How should schools be understood as learning communities? Communities are

> defined by their centers--repositories of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed cement for bonding people together in a common cause. Centers govern what is valuable to a community. They provide norms that guide behavior and give meaning to community life. (p. 47)

The critical perspective presents language as the most prominent social means of reifying ideology in any organization. Thus, the focus of school leaders should be on the language regarding schools used by society, by members of the school community, and by the administrator personally.

Language is the means whereby the myths and values which are subconsciously adhered to are translated into overt representations. The exposure of this underlying ideology occurs when individuals are provided with the impetus and means to reflect on what has occurred and then engage in open dialogue about these perceptions. Bernstein (1976) termed such discourse by school personnel as a "free, unconstrained community of inquirers" (p. 214). Thus, the administrator is not viewed as one who has more power, but as one who provides the setting and climate for all members of the school community, including the administrator, to engage in open dialogue as equals in order to expose the underlying influences on school personnel behavior.

Such exposure must result in more than mere knowledge. The exposure of underlying influences on school personnel must result in a change of perceptions which is made apparent through a change in language and action. Action should be based on personal choice and become more emancipated from ideological influences. This more freely situated behavior is termed by Habermas (as cited in Bernstein, 1976) as strategic

action in that it depends upon correct evaluation of alternative choices which result from calculation supplemented by values and not from calculation based on control.

Dialogue in a school community must be free of all vestiges of power and authority. School leaders must allow for unfettered expression because as O'Neill (as cited in Forester, 1985) clarified:

> Dialogue cannot grow where men or women are arrogant and domineering; it can be sustained only in humility. Such humility cannot be present where a few people consider themselves wise and the rest ignorant or when men and women set themselves apart and unwillingly bend in the service of others. (p. 68)

This dialogue must not be constrained by traditional authoritarian concepts. All members of the school community, including students, must participate because, as O"Neill (Forester, 1985) contended: "Wherever some men or women presume to speak for others, they make the world less human" (p. 67). This role by students in critical dialogue was elucidated by Apple (1979):

> It might be wise to consider engaging students in the articulation and development of paradigms of activity within their everyday lives at school. Such involvement could enable students to come to grips with and amplify crucial insights into their own conditionedness and freedom. (p. 101)

Thus, all members of the school community should engage in free and unrestrained dialogue in order to free this community from the repression of ideology held by members of the community.

Consistent critique in the school setting results in no generalized, abstract behaviors for school leaders to demonstrate. Generalized behaviors are viewed as imposed

by societal ideology and are thus to be critiqued by the administrator. School communities which engage in critique are dynamic and evolutionary with change as an intrinsic component. Tuthill and Ashton (1983) described the climate of such a community:

> Educational communities must ensure that their truths are constantly open to review and scrutiny by all those who may be affected by these truths, and they must ensure that when decisions are made, that evidence is drawn from as wide a variety of sources as possible. Educational communities must also make sure that decisions are made objectively and that these decisions are subjected to constant review, reanalysis, and change. (p. 13)

The resultant actions from critical dialogue in the school community should be empowering to all members of the community. Critical school leadership encourages open dialogue in all aspects of education, most especially, in the area of decision making in which reflection and dialogue make apparent the changes in values and actions.

Clark (as cited in Deakin, 1985) viewed administrative decision making as the formalized expression of community or non-community in a school:

> It is quite clear that how decisions are arrived at largely reflects the ideological stances of those in administrative power. Whether to be agents of social change or social control, whether to perpetuate or eliminate economic and political domination and oppression--these are the crucial issues facing educational administrators as they go about their daily task of deciding what goes on in their schools. (p. 30)

Because of multiple responsibilities, school leaders often make decisions in haste in order to expedite action and, consequently, critical issues and perspectives are neglected. "Decisions are often made too quickly, only to be regretted later on when forces are set in motion that could have been avoided if the implications of one's actions had been thought

through more fully" (Apple, 1988, p. 306). Critical school leaders who view schools as learning communities do not impose expedient decisions on subordinates but encourage and engage in open dialogue in order to reach the most satisfying conclusion. "The consideration of competing claims must be within a context of free, undistorted and non-coercive communication where the interests of the various parties are understood, and where decisions embody the good of all members, and not just the interests of administrative decision makers" (Clarke as cited in Deakin, 1985, p. 28).

The leader of a school community engages in open dialogue because the members of the community are viewed as equals who share the vision and values of the community. If the school is a community, then the members of the school equally define the community. The result is true democracy and the liberation of all members from the constraints of personal and societal ideologies. In such a school community, all members can be emancipated because this is the ultimate goal of the actions of a critical school leader.

Direction for the Future

The current reform movement in public education is based on the premise that changing policy will lead to change in practice. Externally imposed changes will not change what occurs behind closed classroom doors. In order to change education and not the forms of education, intrinsic not superficial transformation must be sought. Sarason

(1990) contended that there has been a surfeit of band-aid reforms at a time when education is systemically unsound. To truly reform schools, the ideologically based issues in society and within schools which maintain the status quo and resist change must be exposed. Thus, critical theory's application to education becomes crucial, if school reform is to come to pass.

Critical educators understand that educational problems are really societal problems which can never be solved solely within schools. Schools maintain and reflect the ideologies of society and for school problems to be resolved, societal problems first must be exposed and solved. Critical educators are aware of the interrelatedness between schools and society and, according to Razik and Swanson (1993), critical educators ". . . strive for an educational system that will influence society rather than permit society to dominate and control educational and other social institutions" (p. 558).

However, critical educators also acknowledge that reform must occur within schools by exposing the underlying ideologies which are the bases for school behaviors. These behaviors are caused by power struggles which control all members of the school community. The exposure and ultimate change of these power-based associations are pivotal because, as Sarason (1990) indicated: "Ignore these relationships, leave unexamined their rationale, and the existing 'system' will defeat efforts at reform" (p. 7). Critical educators affirm that the narrow perspectives of individuals in schools must be eradicated through collaborative dialogue in order to break down adversarial relationships and begin to work together as a true school community.

Critical school leaders believe that school reform can occur and that societal and personal changes can take place. Through reflection and dialogue, underlying ideologies which contribute to and maintain the status quo can be exposed so that school reform can focus on fundamental and not on superficial issues. Critical school leaders do not dwell on problems but are optimistic that reflection and dialogue will result in educational change. Giroux (1992) summarized this critical perspective of school leadership: "This is leadership that dreams in order to change the world rather than manage it" (p. 19).

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